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# ***Wrestling Observer Newsletter***

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For the last few weeks, I've been trying to come up with a modern analogy for what happened 30 years ago this week.

And the reality is there is no modern analogy that would fit.

The closest would be if, in 2007 or 2008, when UFC was on the ascent and WWE was stagnant, when tuning into Raw on the USA Network, you would see the usual open of the show, but when it started, there would be an empty arena, and Josh Matthews, minus Michael Cole or Jerry Lawler, welcomed Dana White, who would be the closest equivalent, and he'd pitch to a bunch of taped fights that had already appeared on Spike. The idea is almost completely ridiculous.

But on July 14, 1984, 30 year ago this week, that's almost exactly what happened. Shortly thereafter, Mike Rosen, an Observer cartoon writer from that period, dubbed it "Black Saturday," the name that has stuck with it for the next three decades.

The entire year of 1984 was one of weekly surprises for wrestling fans all over the country. In many markets, St. Louis and San Francisco among them, they already had their similar moment. Fans would tune into their weekly local wrestling show, in St. Louis it was the promotion Sam Muchnick had retired from nearly two years earlier that was one of the most successful in the country, only to see "Wrestling at the Chase" now being from the Arena in St. Louis, with the stars of the WWF. In San Francisco, "AWA All-Star Wrestling" was replaced by "WWF Superstars of Wrestling," on KTVU, the strongest independent station on the West Coast. The same held true in numerous markets around the country since WWF's battle plan for expansion was to go into existing markets, and buy the rights to put programming on the existing and established channel and time slot. In markets like St. Louis and San Francisco, which had been working on a barter system in that the promoter would provide the tape and in exchange, get some ad time to promote their house shows and the station could sell the rest of the time. McMahon came in, guaranteed the station \$2,000 to \$2,500 in markets of that size, less in smaller markets, more in larger markets, to air his shows. McMahon was not the first promoter to do so, as in the late 50s and early 60s, Jim Barnett pioneered that practice, much to the chagrin of NWA President Sam Muchnick, who felt such a practice in the long run would be bad for wrestling. In the 80s, the word got around and the cost of time slots escalated. Soon, in New York, stations were getting \$8,000 to \$10,000 per week. Ultimately, these costs were a key reason, in some cases the key reason, that Mid South Wrestling, Jim Crockett Promotions, ECW and Smoky Mountain Wrestling went out of business.

The change wasn't that big to fans in some markets, particularly in the AWA markets, because Gene Okerlund, the main voice of the product, Hulk Hogan, the top star, and David Shultz, his big rival, all came over immediately. It was a flashier product with more stars, and business, at least in San Francisco, went way up. Of course, those in San Francisco never fully accepted the AWA as the local promotion as in local fans' eyes it never came close to matching the action and excitement of the Roy Shire promotion of the 60s and 70s.

Those in St. Louis had seen the product and ratings decline badly in 1983 with the retirement of Muchnick on January 1, 1982, and the quitting of General Manager and booker Larry Matysik after the Ric Flair vs. Bruiser Brody record gate in early 1983. Matysik, who shared Muchnick's philosophy on how to run the market. That clearly appealed far more than the Bob Geigel/Harley Race philosophy that was in control the rest of the year, and produced television so bad that KPLR, the flagship station, wanted to get rid of their show and bring in a new promoter.

Each week, more major names from other promotions would show up on WWF television.

Pro wrestling's biggest national television shows at the time were World Championship Wrestling, a two-hour show produced by Georgia Championship Wrestling, Inc., taped every Saturday morning at the TBS studios on Techwood Drive, and airing from 6:05 p.m. to 8:05 p.m. Eastern on Saturday nights, and Best of World Championship Wrestling, a Sunday one-hour show at 6:05 p.m.

There was no staggered feed. On the West Coast, it was 3:05 p.m. to 5:05 p.m., absolutely the worst time, particularly in the summer. It was the big wrestling show to watch, and in the summer it was often frustrating, particularly if the Atlanta Braves baseball game would run long, as wrestling would be joined in progress, meaning key angles and matches never aired. The era was different. Wrestling fans were going to watch wrestling whenever it aired. And they were going to sit and wait for baseball games, whether they were in extra innings or long rain delays, to end.

Make no mistake about it, the shows were an institution. The time slot dated back to December 25, 1971, when booker Ray Gunkel moved the Atlanta TV wrestling show to Ted Turner's Ch. 17, WTCG (Turner had purchased the channel in 1970, changed the initials to WTCG, which in a promotional campaign, stood for "Watch This Channel Grow") in Atlanta. In 1972, when a promotional war started, because Ann Gunkel was so close with Turner, the station actually aired two different promotions. They taped back-to-back on Saturday mornings in the studio and that's where the two hour time slot came. In 1974, when Gunkel's All South lost the war, and Jim Barnett's Georgia Championship Wrestling bought her out, GCW got both hours.

In late 1976, Turner put his station up on satellite and it started airing on various cable channels. The idea appeared foolhardy. The idea is, if you were in San Antonio, why would you watch a UHF TV channel from Atlanta. Early WTCG shows featured ads for car dealers and furniture stores in Atlanta, as opposed to national advertising.

The reason people would watch were, they could see Atlanta sports teams, most notably the Braves, as well as reruns of The Andy Griffith Show. But it was Georgia Championship Wrestling that became the star on the station, the first show on cable television to be watched weekly in 1 million homes at a time when the station was only beamed into 15 million homes.

It was the weirdest thing. It was a two hour show, but from 1974 into the early 80s, it was treated like two one-hour shows. Gordon Solie would sign off after one hour. The musical intro would play to start the second show, and he would sign back on for a second hour like it was a completely different show. Often the same talent that worked the first hour matches would come back and wrestle again in the second hour.

In 1982, after Georgia Championship Wrestling had successfully expanded into Michigan and Ohio, it renamed itself World Championship Wrestling. The Georgia singles, TV and tag team titles in 1980 and 1981 became the National heavyweight (for a short period of time the Georgia and National titles were separate but they eventually merged), TV and tag team titles. When then babyface-delivering heel Kevin Sullivan was TV champion, he would say calmly to Solie that "I'm the best wrestler on national television," which Solie would disagree with, and Sullivan would claim the name of the belt saying so.

The original success in Ohio and Michigan caused stockholders Jack and Gerald Brisco to push to Barnett to expand nationally to the markets where they were getting the most fan mail. Barnett refused to go into established markets saying the other promoters were his friends, while the Briscos argued that there were no friends.

But by 1984, Georgia Championship Wrestling had lost a lot of steam.

Three years earlier, the first run Saturday show averaged a 6.4 rating, and the Sunday show, featuring nothing but matches that had mostly aired the week before, and occasional matches from other territories, averaged a 6.6. It was the place to be. Besides the regulars, top stars from around the country would fly into Atlanta on Saturday morning for the national exposure. When fans tuned in on Saturday afternoon, you never knew if you'd see Ric Flair, Gino Hernandez, Kevin Von Erich, Mad Dog Vachon, Andre the Giant, Harley Race, Terry Funk, a former NFL star or boxing contender, a well known local politician, or even WWF champion Bob Backlund or AWA champion Nick Bockwinkel in studio. At the time, the announcing was being done by Solie and sidekick Roddy Piper, a dynamic that was revolutionary for its time.

But the promotion was having trouble financially. They fell deep into debt because of Jim Barnett, the controversial head of the promotion, using company money to pay for his lavish lifestyle, including \$1,000 per month phone bills, a penthouse apartment, a private chef and a chauffeur. For years, Barnett living like a king off the GCW profits wasn't an issue, because in the state of Georgia alone, they were drawing about 800,000 to 1 million fans per year.

But things changed. Production costs increased. A huge change was that the Atlanta City Auditorium, the company's weekly building that held 5,300 fans, was shut down. During the 70s, they'd run every Friday night at the City Auditorium, and tape television the next morning. Every month or two, they'd load up the show, bringing in talent from other promotions like Ric Flair, Cowboy Bill Watts, Andre the Giant, or world champion Harley Race, and move it to the Omni, the 16,500-seat Arena, which would also house the holiday shows that drew the year's biggest crowds. Atlanta was the company's main profit center.

But when the auditorium shut down, Atlanta became a break-even proposition, or worse. They ran weekly at the Omni, which cost far more than the City Auditorium. They were still able at first to draw 5,000 fans most weeks, but the problem was, that was the number they needed to break even. Some weeks they lost money, some they made money. Going to the Omni itself was no longer a draw where the casual fan who wouldn't go weekly would hear that it's Omni week and that alone would swell the audience by a few thousand. The city that was the profit center was breaking even, and eventually, losing money most weeks. Suddenly, Barnett's lifestyle was a factor.

Ole Anderson, the booker and promo master, who Barnett had hired to handle the wrestling operations years ago and made him one of the higher paid talents in the business, thought things weren't right. He investigated the books. When he found out where the money was going, he threatened Barnett with embezzlement charges unless Barnett resigned immediately. Barnett, who was part of the cultural elite class in Georgia, hobnobbing with city leaders as this refined, very intelligent man, asked if he could retain at least a title in the company even if he would have no power and be taken off salary. Anderson offered no sympathy. The guy who led Georgia Championship Wrestling to winning a bitter promotional war over All-South Wrestling eight years earlier, the Treasurer of the National Wrestling Alliance, who booked the world champion for years, was completely out.

But not for long. Barnett was hired by Vincent Kennedy McMahon and before long was the Director of Operations for Titan Sports. At the 1983 National Wrestling Alliance meeting in Las Vegas, Vince McMahon, his father and Barnett all resigned from the alliance, which was step one in the "War of 84," which changed pro wrestling in North America forever.

Under Anderson, the mantra became cutting costs. The promotion formerly used the best talent in the country, but now became a second-tier regional group. Crowds were down, and pay for talent was down. Annual attendance for GCW in 1983 was down 60 percent. But with all the cost cutting, they were no longer bleeding money, and taking care of their debt.

At the time, Anderson was on a salary of \$125,000 per year, huge money for a wrestler in 1983 and 1984. Georgia Championship Wrestling's profits for 1983 were \$20,000. Several of the owners, used to big dividends each quarter, were making next to nothing with their stock, while mad that Anderson was making big money as booker and General Manager and were watching the attendance and ratings decline.

There were eight shareholders in GCW in early 1984. James Oates, a Chicago financier, who knew Barnett from college and was his money man in almost all his wrestling endeavors dating back three decades, owned 26 percent. Paul Jones, not the wrestler for the figurehead promoter from Atlanta, an ex-wrestling star in the area generations earlier, owned 22 percent.

Jack Brisco, Buddy Colt, Tim Woods and Bill Watts had been given stock under the recommendation of Eddie Graham in 1972 when ABC Bookings, the previous company, folded and Georgia Championship Wrestling, Inc. was formed, and the war with Gunkel started.

Watts came in as booker and Brisco and Colt were the top face and heel in Florida. Woods had been the biggest drawing card in Georgia a few years earlier as the white-masked Mr. Wrestling, but quit after setting a record gate with Gene Kiniski in a 1968 world title match in Atlanta, because he felt he wasn't getting a fair payoff from then-General Manager Ray Gunkel.

By 1972, Woods was one of the top stars in Florida. With Graham inserting himself in the role of making the big calls to get the new promotion going, he figured a big move would be to bring Mr. Wrestling back. This also led to the creation of Mr. Wrestling II, who became GCW's biggest star for most of the 70s, because Mr. Wrestling was still headlining in Florida so only worked major shows in Georgia, and he brought in his protégé who started headlining in the other markets. As a team, or as rivals, the two Mr. Wrestling's were the key players until the emergence of Dusty Rhodes as the top star in Atlanta, with his legendary rivalry with Ole Anderson.

When Jack Brisco was world champion, he moved from Tampa to Atlanta, meaning he worked Georgia all the time, a big factor in the wrestling war. Knowing he would need a manipulator who knew every dirty trick to keep the NWA in power since all the familiar stars went with Gunkel's All South group, Graham maneuvered Barnett to be General Manager and Watts to be booker. Later, when things had become successful, Graham brought Watts to Florida to book and Barnett brought in Jerry Jarrett as his booker.

Originally, Leo Garibaldi, the booker of the late 60s who built the territory around Mr. Wrestling, was brought in to replace Watts. The first thing Garibaldi did was have the guys Watts build lose to guys he brought in. Watts blew up, told Graham he needed to fire Garibaldi and "It can't wait," calling him a "dumb motherf\*\*\*er" a few times during the conversation. Watts came back to book a few more weeks before Barnett brought Jarrett in.

The idea is that if they were stockholders in Georgia, they would be more apt to work dates there since they'd not only get a payoff, usually a main event, but also get a percentage of the show's profits. It was felt that Brisco, Watts, Woods and Colt were all that important for the NWA side to win the bitter wrestling war when all the established stars from recent television went to the opposition.

The wrestling war in Georgia started on Thanksgiving morning of 1972. Ray Gunkel, who was running ABC Booking, had passed away after a match with Ox Baker. His widow, former model Ann Gunkel, now owning Ray's stock, wanted to act like an owner of the company. Not wanting a woman or someone they considered an outsider with an opinion around, the other owners folded the company, and restarted a new company without her. Ann Gunkel got financing and much to the chagrin of the NWA side, every single wrestler, office employee and referee, with the exception of mid-carder Bob Armstrong and prelim wrestler Darrell Cochran went with her. She promised better working conditions and pay. In the media, All-South, with all the local stars, was presented as the babyface promotion, with the idea Ann was the widow of Ray, the most beloved wrestler in the state, who the other partners tried to screw out of her husband's stock.

It was front page news, the biggest news story in the city that Thanksgiving morning that every wrestler in the promotion, except two, had quit to form a new promotion while the NWA had its traditional biggest show of the year that night.

The other Georgia owners turned to Eddie Graham, who ran Florida and was the powerful force in the Southeast that everyone listened to. Graham managed to get, at the last minute, several of his Florida stars, including Jack Brisco, as well as Watts, Mad Dog Vachon, Hiro Matsuda and others into Atlanta to put together an all-star card of matches that weren't promoted on television.

The NWA group retained the rights to the Atlanta City Auditorium, and with the NWA ties, was able to bring in all-star cards and the biggest names in wrestling while All South was limited in booking because wrestlers knew if they worked for Ann Gunkel, there was the threat of NWA blacklisting.

The corner was turned in 1973 when Mr. Wrestling drew big crowds in chasing Dory Funk Jr. for the world title. They built to a climactic match on June 1, 1973, at the Omni, where Mr. Wrestling announced he would unmask at the start of the match. There was a buzz in town, with the idea that the NWA would never allow a masked man to be world champion, and that by unmasking, Mr. Wrestling would be allowed to beat Funk Jr., or if they had a different mindset, would simply beat Funk Jr. since he had long been portrayed as the best technical wrestler in the business.

But one week earlier, Harley Race beat Funk Jr. in Kansas City to win the title. Mr. Wrestling unmasked at the start of the match as Tim Woods. He had already unmasked in Florida as Woods some time earlier which fans in South Georgia, which could get the Florida show off the Jacksonville station, knew about, but Atlanta fans except for the hardcores were unaware. The show drew a sellout of 16,500 fans, establishing the Omni as "The Madison Square Garden of the South," and GCW as a powerful promotion that the top talent came in for. The match ended in a 60 minute draw, with Race out from the sleeper hold when the bell rang.

Over the next decade, through buying others and selling to his brother, Jack Brisco owned 10 percent and Gerald Brisco also owned 9.5 percent, from buying Colt's five percent and buying five percent that his brother had purchased from Barnett to increase from his original ten percent.

The rest of the stock was owned by Columbus, GA promoter Fred Ward (15 percent), General Manager Alan "Ole Anderson" Rogowski (10 percent, who purchased his stock from Watts a few years after Watts formed Mid South Wrestling), Ward's son-in-law Ralph Freed, a partner in Columbus (5 percent) and Gene Anderson (2.5 percent, Ole's working brother whose real name was Gene Anderson, had purchased the stock Woods owned).

Both Briscos were frustrated that their dividends for owning Georgia was amounting to nothing, after also being frustrating that when the company was hot, Barnett didn't take advantage of the national following to expand.

In early 1984, even though the company had gotten itself out of the Barnett-incurred debt, Jack Brisco thought the direction of using the cheaper talent and attendance falling so drastically was in the long run a disaster.

At the time, the Briscos was wrestling in the Carolinas for Jim Crockett, working as heels and bounding the world tag team titles back-and-forth with Wahoo McDaniel & Mark

Youngblood. Anderson was running Georgia, but his mother had died back in Minnesota, so he flew back for a week.

Jack heard that Roddy Piper, a good friend of his that he had feuded with in the Carolinas, had cut his hand. He called the WWF offices, and ended up talking to Vince McMahon. McMahon brought up the idea of buying their stock in GCW, and essentially doing a hostile takeover.

The Briscos were able to get the voting proxies from Jones and Oates to negotiate a deal. Jones was old and pretty much senile, so his wife really was making the decisions and the idea of getting \$244,000 in cash and getting out of wrestling at that point appealed to her. Oates was willing to get out, as the only reason he had shares was because he acquired them for Barnett in a stock trade in 1974 where he got Georgia stock in exchange for selling the Australian territory when they got out. Suspicious minds would believe Barnett, one of the game's great manipulators, was behind this as revenge for Anderson kicking him out of the company he built. But from all accounts, Barnett had nothing to do with this and it was the Briscos as the point men.

When they went to meet with Vince McMahon, they controlled the rights to sell him 67.5 percent of the company, meaning he could take over.

After a conversation, McMahon sent Jack & Gerald Brisco tickets to LaGuardia Airport, and they met in the Delta VIP Lounge.

Keep in mind that Ward, Freed, Ole & Gene Anderson had no idea any of this was going on.

In getting Jones' proxy, the Briscos found out that Anderson was also trying to buy Jones' stock, as well as the stock of Ward and Freed, and with Gene, that would give him 54 percent, so he'd own the controlling interest and be able to make the moves he pleased without answering to the other stockholders.

What was amazing is that the conversation at LaGuardia Airport and verbal agreement to a deal took place in February or March 1984, but it took the WWF lawyers and the Briscos lawyers, until early April to finalize all aspects of the deal, but the principals involved had to keep it a secret.

Vince & Linda McMahon, their attorneys, the Briscos, Jones, Oates and their attorneys met at the offices of well-known Atlanta attorney John Taylor on April 9, 1984. After about 14 hours of final negotiations, Vince wrote a check for \$750,000 to the various partners and owned 67.5 percent of the company, and for that moment, Vince and Ole Anderson were technically partners, although Ole didn't know it until a secretary called him while he was in Minnesota and told him that Vince McMahon had taken over the company, and figured that everyone would be out of a job.

Oates went along with the sale, but called the Briscos money-grubbers and felt they had double-crossed Barnett by not backing him when Anderson got Barnett kicked out of the company.

While everything had been secretive until that point, after that meeting, it was known in wrestling that Vince McMahon had bought the promotion and was going to take over TBS time

slots. Anderson went to court to block the deal, stating bylaws that all owners had to agree on taking a new owner in, which didn't happen. There was a sleight of hand as before they sold the company, with their majority ownership, the owners there voted to rescind that part of company bylaws. In July, the judge ruled in favor of McMahon being able to take over the company, ruling he legally bought out the majority of stock. McMahon eventually paid Anderson \$100,000 for his stock and paid Ward and Freed \$150,000 and \$50,000 each.

That may have been the reason McMahon ended up so far behind in paying bills for the next year. After the success of WrestleMania I, the \$1 million buyout of the TBS contract by Jim Crockett Jr. and a major money booking agreement with New Japan Pro Wrestling, all in early 1985, made the WWF financially solvent and they started catching up on paying television and other bills.

While we were the only source that had reported the deal having gone down and a change being imminent, virtually all the fans tuning in on July 14, 1984, expected to see the usual studio wrestling show and the stars who worked in the area.

Instead, the show opened in the studio, but it was empty. Freddie Miller, the co-host of the show, who would introduce Solie and conduct interviews, instead introduced the new host, Vince McMahon, and welcomed the WWF to TBS. Miller was just about the only familiar face from the old show who appeared that night. McMahon then pitched to matches from different major arenas featuring his wrestlers.

McMahon had offered the GCW wrestlers jobs, and few took him up on the offer. He claimed publicly when criticized because of Solie's big following nationally at the time for not hiring him, said he had offered Solie a job. Solie always claimed that never happened. He told the existing champions, National champion the Don "The Spoiler" Jardine, NWA jr. heavyweight champion Les Thornton, TV champion Ron Garvin and tag team champions Garvin & Jerry Oates (who had a few days earlier beaten the Road Warriors, who were aware of the situation and figured Georgia was going down, so left to work for Verne Gagne) that they could come in as champions. Spoiler, who had the size McMahon liked, was 44 by that time and was on his careers last legs. He and Thornton, who was 50, actually were on WWF television with their belts and billed as champions for a few weeks, before it was completely forgotten and they ended up being essentially jobbers. The other key star who went with McMahon was Mr. Wrestling II, Georgia's biggest star. Wrestling II was always a headliner by that point, but at the age of 49, his best days were behind him. By WWF standards, Wrestling II was small, old and didn't have an impressive body, and was used as a job guy. Even after he left, the television exposure of II as a nobody pretty well killed his career marketability. The only guy working the Georgia territory at the time who ended up getting a push was Nikolai Volkoff, who was put into a tag team with the Iron Sheik and they became the company's top heel team, and is remembered as one of the company's more iconic characters of its expansion era. Volkoff had previously had runs as a mainline heel in WWWF.

TBS was besieged by so many angry phone calls that it became a national news story. The theme of the calls was that "We want our wrestling back with Gordon Solie." McMahon in the news stories talked about how fans would soon see the difference between what they had seen and his brand. He said that the ratings, which had dropped 35 percent from the peak

of a few years earlier, would rebound to former levels. He also tried to claim that angry phone calls were not people acting on their own, but something his rival promoters had set up.

When the word got out the Briscos put the deal together, they were viewed negatively by many, particularly since Jack was a former NWA champion who had been a headliner in most of the NWA territories, and he and Gerald were NWA world tag team champions. Both of their wives were called and told stories about them having affairs on the road. Anderson threatened to send the Road Warriors to Tampa to break their legs. After word had gotten out about the sale, the Briscos dropped the NWA tag titles to McDaniel & Mark Youngblood on May 5, 1984, at the Greensboro Coliseum, and their last NWA match was a rematch the next day in Charlotte. In late September, they started as a team in WWF, feuding with Adrian Adonis & Dick Murdoch over the tag titles, but Jack retired in early 1985, never to come back, and Gerald, while he had a second run as a stooge for McMahon years later, ended his active career in early 1985 as well. But Gerald has been employed by WWE ever since, currently as a talent scout.

Ted Turner responded to the protests by working with Ole Anderson and giving him a one-hour show. Unfortunately, the only available time slot was 7 a.m. on Saturday mornings, and the short-lived Championship Wrestling from Georgia was formed, with Gordon Solie as announcer.

Because of the time slot, viewership was significantly lower and the new Georgia group struggled. Anderson's top attractions, the Road Warriors, left for the AWA, and most of his other major stars also went to different groups. While McMahon had put Spoiler as National champion on TV, Anderson's group, which used the National titles names and legacies of GCW, simply claimed Ted DiBiase had beaten Spoiler and was the National champion.

1984 was the key year in changing the pro wrestling business. For the next several months, the WWF had the key time slots on TBS, USA and by far the best national syndication package. Nobody could match them for television exposure and they outdistanced all rivals. It's hard to explain just how important this move was at the time. While several regional groups were doing great business in 1984, like the AWA, Mid South, World Class, Jarrett Promotions and Crockett Promotions, and the media was discovering wrestling because of the involvement of Cyndi Lauper, the only group that got covered was WWF. They were the group that was on both of the major national cable stations that carried wrestling, and they were the dominant group in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago.

Crockett eventually got the TBS slot a year later, and had a couple of big years, but he was always playing catch up, except in his home territory.

The TBS Saturday and Sunday ratings fell in 1984-85, despite McMahon claiming he would show the people a product that would be more popular than the one that preceded him.

In 1985, Turner and Watts reached a verbal agreement. Turner wanted to get into wrestling and Watts' television show was doing amazing ratings within his territory. In many of his markets, half the people watching television when Mid South Wrestling was on were watching his show. The agreement was that Turner would provide the time slot on TBS and finance a national expansion and Turner and Watts would follow Vince McMahon's lead and be his competition.

Put in an unfamiliar time slot on Saturdays, Watts' Mid South Wrestling did a 5.3 ratings average, making it the highest rated show on cable television, beating the WWF show in the familiar slots by 1.5 ratings points or more.

Knowing Turner was going to kick McMahon off the station between the falling ratings and not producing a show in his studios as per the contract, McMahon sold the time slot to Crockett, a deal brokered by Barnett.

When the deal was put together, Turner lost interest in Mid South and in promoting wrestling. He felt that for the good of the business, there should only be one promotion on the station, and it was Crockett. It was actually the deal that, until Solie was brought back years later by WCW, which ended the Solie run as the voice of wrestling on the SuperStation. Most figured Crockett would go with Solie when he got TBS, but instead, he went with the younger Tony Schiavone.

Crockett's business grew greatly in 1985 and 1986 while on TBS, drawing 1.9 million paying customers in 1986. Watts tried to make up for the loss of TBS by buying TV time around the country to have national exposure. But the bills put him deep in debt, and his home region stopped drawing, partially due to the oil business crash, that killed entertainment in his key cities like Houston and New Orleans.

In 1987, Watts, losing \$50,000 per week because of the costs of his TV network and inability to draw at home, sold Mid South Sports to Crockett for \$4.3 million, of which Watts actually only got \$1.2 million. Crockett bought the company for its television network, but the cost of the time slots and overspending, plus being outmaneuvered by McMahon in the PPV world and stale top of the card booking led to him getting deeply in debt. Crockett Promotions sold to Turner Broadcasting in 1988 for \$9 million.

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APRIL 27, 2020 – F4W WEBSITE

Gerald Brisco, who has been with WWE since 1984, was the latest name to surface as being released.

Brisco, who is 73, along with brother Jack, were key figures in the wrestling war when they were able to get a majority of shareholders to sell their stock in Georgia Championship Wrestling to Vince McMahon, without General Manager Ole Anderson's knowledge.

The move gave McMahon both wrestling time slots on TBS in 1984-85, meaning during a key period in history, he controlled every highly-rated national cable slot.

Brisco was one of the best pro wrestlers of the 70s and early 80s, both as a world junior heavyweight champion and holding multiple tag team titles with older brother Jack, who was one of the greatest pro wrestlers who ever lived.

He worked in the office with McMahon and was one of his most trusted advisors, being one of the very few people told ahead of time about the 1997 screwjob on Bret Hart. He was a television character during the Attitude Era and later became the company's top talent scout, through his connections in the amateur wrestling world as a former Oklahoma State wrestler.

Brisco discovered Brock Lesnar as a junior at Minnesota and signed him along with almost every top amateur wrestler of the last 25 years who has come through the company's doors.

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MAY 4, 2020

Brisco, 73, as a non-office employee, was furloughed, but it was shocking since he had worked for the company since 1984. At one time Brisco was one of those closest to Vince McMahon. Most notably, when it came to the 1997 Survivor Series screw job on Bret Hart, the only people who it confirmed knew ahead of time were Brisco, HHH and Shawn Michaels. Referee Earl Hebner, and twin brother Dave, weren't told until just before the match started. It is believed that Pat Patterson didn't know, and was swerved by McMahon to get the Michaels sharpshooter spot into the match without actually being told what it was for, while other higher-ups in creative like Jim Ross, Vince Russo, Jim Cornette (who actually inadvertently was the one who came up with what was used as the finish) and Bruce Prichard were not told, even though both Russo and Cornette were in discussion with McMahon after McMahon couldn't get a finish when Michaels, on the advice of HHH, refused to put Hart over in the match, after Hart had previously refused to put Michaels over after Michaels twice told Hart he would never put him over.

Brisco's role was, in the hotel room the night before the match, to give Michaels a crash course in self defense in case Hart attacked Michaels in the ring after the double-cross. Months earlier, Hart and Michaels had a backstage fight before a Raw taping after exchanging words after Michaels the week before in a television promo said Bret had been having "Sunny Days," when he said Hart was no role model like he portrayed. In that fight, which was said to be one-sided, Hart spun Michaels around and pulled out a large clump of his hair.

More importantly, Brisco was a key player in the 1984 wrestling war. Brisco and older brother Jack held points in Georgia Championship Wrestling, which was run by Ole Anderson. At the same time they were also NWA world tag team champions.

Georgia Championship Wrestling was a very successful and profitable promotion during its heyday in the late 70s. In 1981, its television show on WTBS in Atlanta was doing a 6.4 rating on Saturdays and a 6.6 rating on Sundays, the two most-watched shows on cable television. But it was a live event business and its profit center was Atlanta. After the closing of the City Auditorium, they ran weekly at the Omni, but due to the rent, drawing 5,000 fans on average was not successful, and soon, the number dropped well below that.

Anderson cut costs heavily. Top stars were used less frequently. The quality of the shows and star power went way down. Television ratings declined significantly and the live gates dropped 60 percent. However, due to the cost cutting, they were not operating at a loss like in 1982.

Vince McMahon had just gone national. At the time, while syndicated wrestling was far more important, and McMahon was acquiring and buying syndication in all the key markets, when it came to cable, the two key stations were the USA Network, which McMahon was on, and TBS, which aired Anderson's show.

In early April, Jack Brisco called Vince McMahon and said he and Jerry were willing to sell their percentage of Georgia Championship, feeling that even though it wasn't losing money, the popularity was dropping so fast they privately feared their stock would be worthless. McMahon flew Jack & Jerry Brisco to LaGuardia Airport for a meeting and McMahon agreed to pay either \$10,000 or \$11,100 per point (different numbers have been claimed at different times) as long as they could deliver him at least 51 percent of the stock, meaning controlling interest.

The Briscos, who owned 19.5 percent between them, convinced Jim Oates (Jim Barnett's money man who owned 26 percent) and Paul Jones, not the pro wrestling star from the 60s to 80s but an old-time wrestler who was pushed to the public as the Atlanta promoter, who owned 22 percent.

The Briscoes sold 67.5 percent of the company to McMahon without Anderson, and other stockholders like Gene Anderson, Fred Ward and Ralph Freed's knowledge at a private meeting attended by Vince & Linda McMahon, Jack & Jerry Brisco, Oates & Jones on April 19, 1984 and the papers were signed at 10 p.m.

The key to the deal was that in 1984-85, a crucial point in the wrestling war, it would give McMahon every nationally televised wrestling outlet. McMahon went to fold Georgia Championship Wrestling and put WWF on TBS.

It didn't turn out perfectly. There was a court fight where Anderson tried to get the sale voided because they did it behind the back of Anderson, Ward and Freed. However, in court, the bylaws of the company did not make it clear all partners had to agree to a sale. The story of the sale was mostly secret, but there were people behind-the-scenes aware of the purchase and court fight.

After Anderson failed to block the sale, on July 14, 1984, Black Saturday, as it became known (a term coined by Mike Rosen, a cartoonist in this publication), saw WWF on TBS for the first time. There were so many negative letters and phone calls to TBS that just two weeks later, Anderson was given an early Saturday morning time slot on the station for his new promotion, Championship Wrestling from Georgia, which featured most of the wrestlers that were in Georgia Championship Wrestling, with the main exception being his hottest act, the Road Warriors, who went to the better paying AWA.

But it still gave McMahon strongly rated shows on both TBS and USA, to go with his syndicated deals in local markets, and he became the dominant promoter.

McMahon and Ted Turner had problems, from McMahon not doing a weekly show from the TBS Studios, which Turner had wanted (he would send in arena tapes and do wrap-arounds) to the declining ratings to McMahon being furious that Turner gave Anderson a show on the station he had paid so much to get the rights for.

Turner and Bill Watts at first reached a deal, and in a bigger embarrassment to McMahon, Watts' shows on TBS in an unfamiliar time slot averaged a 5.3 rating, significantly higher than McMahon's shows did.

The story ended in 1985 when McMahon sold the time slot to Jim Crockett Jr., for \$1 million, Anderson's promotion, which was losing money, dissolved, and Turner backed out of a

verbal deal to fund Watts going national using TBS as the springboard. Crockett had about two great years on TBS before his business started falling quickly. With debt mounting, he sold in late 1988 to Turner Broadcasting for \$9 million.

Jack & Jerry Brisco lost their NWA world tag team titles to Wahoo McDaniel & Mark Youngblood on May 5, 1984, in Greensboro, a few weeks after the sale was completed. The next day they lost rematches in both Asheville and Charlotte and left the promotion.

They started as a babyface tag team in WWF in September, but Jack retired early the next year after being tired of the travel and the cold weather in the Northeast. Jerry transitioned into a front office role as an agent.

He worked in that role through 2009, when he suffered three strokes. He suffered a fourth minor stroke on October 19, 2011.

Since then, his work with WWE was as a talent scout, where he would go to major college wrestling tournaments throughout the season, as well as other national non-collegiate meets, and scout talent.

Virtually every amateur wrestler of the past two decades that came to the company was recruited by Brisco, with the most notable being Brock Lesnar, who he first saw as a junior at the University of Minnesota. Brisco, when he wrestled for one season at Oklahoma State in the late 60s, was roommates with J Robinson, the Minnesota coach. Robinson asked Brisco to wait to approach Lesnar until after his senior year, which Brisco agreed to